

HONORING JAVARIS DEON
RODGERS

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 8, 2013

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Mr. Javaris Deon Rodgers, a dedicated student, who is making the difference in his community.

Javaris Deon Rodgers was born and raised in Lexington, Mississippi. He is an only child of two very wonderful parents, Andrew and Shirley Rodgers.

Javaris began school around 6 or 7 years of age. Throughout elementary school he has always had Perfect Attendance and has been on either the Dean or Principal's List. He also received the Superintendent's Award because he excelled so well in academics. He is a very active child, taking Taekwondo and playing baseball until middle school.

Javaris joined J.J. McClain Middle School Marching Band and found a real passion for it. He knew that it was something that he wanted to do long term. Throughout high school, he continued to be a part of the marching band, maintained top grades, and keep his perfect attendance record. In high school, Javaris was also a part of the Yearbook Committee and Prom Committee. During his Junior Year in high school, he received the title "Mr. Junior", elected Senior Class President for the following year and nominated for the Who's Who Among American Scholars. Javaris graduated in the top ten of his high school class in May of 2010 and began his journey on to college that fall. He is currently in college working on a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish at Ole Miss in Oxford, MS. He is also a member of the Alpha Phi Omega Community Service Fraternity, Tau Beta Sigma Honorary Band Service Fraternity, and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

Javaris still does community service in the Holmes County community during his breaks. He plans to graduate in May of 2014 with honors.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing this student, Mr. Javaris Deon Rodgers, for his dedication in making a difference in his community.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF "MAMA, I WANT TO SING" THE LONGEST RUNNING OFF-BROADWAY SHOW IN AMERICAN HISTORY

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 8, 2013

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor, recognize, and celebrate the MAMA Foundation's 30th Anniversary of the gospel musical "Mama, I Want to Sing." On Saturday, March 23, 2013, The Dempsey Theater hosted the 30th Anniversary Gala Celebration for "Mama, I Want to Sing," the longest running Black Off-Broadway show in American history, which debuted as a gospel musical in 1983. This Gala event, took place exactly 30 years to the day from when the original production opened in Harlem to great acclaim.

The Gala began with a very special performance that included musical highlights from "Mama, I Want to Sing and Sing, Harlem, Sing!", as well as a performance from the Gospel for Teens Choir. Lesley Stahl, who received an Emmy award for her "60 Minutes" profile on Gospel for Teens, was honored for her contributions to journalism and for her support of the Mama Foundation for the Arts. The 30th Anniversary celebration will include a gala featuring the best of Harlem's renowned restaurants including Sylvia's, Spoonbread, The Red Rooster, Corner Social, Chez Lucien, Jacob's Soul Food, Melba's and Make My Cake. The spiritually uplifting evening culminated in a spontaneous church-inspired closing with R&B divas Cissy Houston, Dionne Warwick, Angie Stone, Valerie Simpson and Crystal Aiken individually joining the Gospel for Teens Choir in a rousing version of "This Little Light of Mine" that brought the sold-out crowd to its feet.

In 1979, Vy Higginsen and her husband, Ken Wydro wrote the book and lyrics for Mama. It was rejected by every major producer in New York. Not one producer believed that the story was worth telling or that an audience could be found for a gospel-based production. Vy and Ken pushed forward and produced the now internationally-acclaimed "Mama, I Want to Sing" gospel musical that tells the story of a talented young girl who dreams of leaving her church choir to pursue a life in popular music, despite strong objections from her mother. A tribute to the many African American artists with church choir roots who rose to fame in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, creator Higginsen based her musical on the life of her sister Doris Troy whose 1963 hit "Just One Look" launched her to international fame. The show, featured original music by Wesley Naylor opened at Harlem's Hecksher Theater (at El Museo del Barrio) in 1983 and since then has become the "little red engine that could" of Off-Off Broadway productions.

In 1998, Vy Higginsen created the Mama Foundation for the Arts to present, preserve, and promote Gospel, Jazz, and R&B as art forms for current and future generations. The Mama Foundation for the Arts (MFA) has been internationally acclaimed for rebuilding Harlem as an artistic cultural center featuring entertainment and arts education. The Mama Foundation has produced a dozen theater productions, which have been performed on several continents, including its best known musical, "Mama, I Want To Sing."

In 2003, Higginsen created the School of Gospel, Jazz, and R&B Arts. Three years later, she formed the award-winning Gospel for Teens program to train youth and "save the music." According to Lesley Stahl from CBS's "60 Minutes," "The Gospel for Teens program is not just teaching gospel, it is saving these kids." Mama Foundation members have performed at numerous special events including the TED2012 Full Spectrum conference, the Congressional Black Caucus' Annual Legislative Conference, The Stellar Awards, and a reception for Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. Madonna, Chaka Khan, opera singer Jessye Norman and gospel artist Shirley Caesar are among the many stars that have shared the stage with the Gospel for Teens Choir.

In 2006, she founded Gospel for Teens, a free educational program that offers a substitute for the arts programs removed from

many inner city schools. For her outstanding contributions to gospel music, she was presented with the Thomas A. Dorsey Most Notable Achievement Award at the 2012 Stellar Gospel Music Awards. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture proclaimed Vy a Harlem Hero in "Harlem Is" a public art and education project of Community Works.

Vocalist and Instructor Ahmaya Knoelle Higginsen, daughter of Vy Higginsen, is the current lead in "Mama, I Want To Sing: The Next Generation." She began her professional career at seven years old starring in "Sing! Mama 2" with Shirley Caesar at the Theatre at Madison Square Garden and during its world tour in Japan. Ahmaya Knoelle has performed in Gospel Is . . .! and Sing, Harlem, Sing! Internationally, as well as recording on several albums. She studied at the Manhattan School of Music and the American Dramatic and Music Academy in New York. Ahmaya Knoelle also teaches private vocal instruction at the Mama Foundation for the Arts and trains young students in the Foundation's Gospel For Teens program.

The Mama Foundation's mission is to present, preserve, and promote the history and fundamentals of gospel, jazz, and rhythm and blues music for current and future generations. The Foundation has established a cultural space in Harlem where youth and adults have access to quality training and employment as performing artists. The Foundation was inspired by the worldwide success of our award-winning musical, "Mama, I Want to Sing." A combination of arts education, public workshops, and live events contribute to Harlem's resurgence as an artistic and cultural destination. I am so very appreciative for the many contributions of Vy Higginsen and the Mama Foundation. The dedication and devotion to the arts of our community is most commendable and deserving of Congressional Recognition. I ask my colleagues and our Nation to join me in this special celebration of the 30th Anniversary of "Mama, I Want to Sing."

HONORING LOUIS NAVARRO

HON. ELIOT L. ENGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 8, 2013

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, throughout our nation's history our freedom has been preserved by members of the Armed Forces, and they continue to do so today. As a Member of Congress, I have consistently supported veterans and servicemen and women. They deserve no less from us. We owe the preservation of our freedoms and our way of life to the veterans who proudly served their country. Today I join the City of Yonkers at its annual Veterans Appreciation Day in honoring Louis Navarro for his long-time service and participation in the community.

He was born in Puerto Rico, but is a long-time resident of Yonkers, and is the First Vice Commander of the Central Committee of Veterans Organization, where as Parade Chairman for the 2013 Memorial Day Parade, he led it to its largest participation in recent years.

Louis Navarro served in the United States Army for nearly thirty years of active and reserve duty, receiving the Bronze Star Medal, the Combat Infantry Badge, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, Expert Rifle Award, and the Army Service Ribbon.